FIRST PART

THE LIFE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

CHAPTER I

THE EVOLUTION OF A MAN FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

A. INFANCY

1. *The day of Birth.*

844 When a new member of the tribe is expected, when the mother begins to feel the pangs of childbirth (ku luŋwa), the father sends word to the midwives of the neighbourhood and all of them come at once. They are called *tinsungakati* (1). Every woman having some experience in this department is a midwife, no special training being required for the qualification (2).

The *place chosen* for the delivery (phuluka) is generally the back of the hut (mahosi) where the pregnant woman lives. Some mats are brought and hung up in such a way as to form a smal

193 (1) This word is interesting. Its termination *ati* is the proper feminine suffix wh is found in nsati, wife, hulukati, female elephant, Nkomati, the river of that nam the rivers being considered as female by the Thongas.

(2) Amongst certain Thonga clans, especially the Khosas of Magude, there is a person who is bound to come and assist the woman in childbirth : this is the mukoŋwana lo' nkulu of her husband i. e. the woman who has been bought with her husband's cousin. The woman in labour leans her head on this woman's chest, whilst the other midwives help her in parturition. When the Rev. F. Paillard went to assist a woman during labour, the "mukoŋwana lo' nkulu" told him : "You have taken my place." See Part II. Ch. I. B. 3).

1: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga

844 enclosure. This is done to protect the woman from indiscreet onlookers. Should there be enough bush to hide her, mats are not used. A big wooden mortar is given to her to lean against during her pains. The whole place is called by a special term *fukwen* or *busaken* (the nest). Should the birth be difficult, the divinatory bones will probably be consulted and the woman will be removed to another place, inside the hut or somewhere else.

844 The baby may be born without any help, but as a rule the midwives consider it their duty to submit their patient to a *long and painful manipulation*, to a regular kneading, performed with the hands, sometimes even with the feet, in order, as they say, to obtain the expulsion of the child and of the after-birth all at once. They sometimes succeed in this feat ! They also often hurt the mother severely. The midwives think that they must be very rough, and have no pity at all on the poor woman. Sometimes the mother loses all her natural feelings in this painful process. I have heard of cases of her refusing to let the child come to the light, biting her helpers, running away. Hence perhaps the attitude adopted by the midwives. The mother must not *fahla ñwana*, viz. break down the child, a technical expression to designate unhappy births.

During the whole labour, it is taboo (1) for the mother to eat or to drink anything ; she would kill the child if she did so. Of course no man must attend the birth ; neither must girls come near. A newly married woman may be allowed to enter the enclosure in order to "be taught." It is also forbidden for the female relations of the woman, her sisters, even her mother to come *fukwen* ; they might be ashamed if their relative behaved badly and "broke her child." They will not come till the following day, when they hear that everything has gone smoothly ; then the father will kill a hen for them.

(1) We translate by taboo the Thonga word *ylla* which means everything prohibited. I beg to give the following provisional definition of this term, which will be found from the first to the last page of this book : Any object, any act, any person that implies a danger to the individual or to the community and that must consequently be avoided, this object, act or person being under a kind of ban. As often as possible, I shall add the explanation which Natives give of these taboos.

844 846 As soon as the child has made his appearance one of the midwives ties the *umbilical cord* (likabana) near the navel and cuts it about three inches from it. The little sore is anointed with a kind of fat ; the bit of cord remaining with the baby is attended to with great care : it generally falls off at the end of the first week, and this is the signal for the end of the period of confinement.

The after-birth, the *placenta*, is also looked for with much anxiety : it is called *yindlu ya ñwana*, the "house of the child," or *hlalu*. When it is delayed too long, the midwives begin to fear "because the blood which is inside has not all come out and will kill the mother." In the Khosa clan, should the placenta not come at once, the woman is told to stand on her feet, her body half bent forward, and all the midwives begin to move their index fingers from right to left, emitting at the same time the following sound : tswi-tswi-tswi-tswi. This is said to help the placenta to come. The placenta is generally buried deep behind the hut on the spot where the birth has taken place ; but some prefer to bury it inside the house, fearing the dogs might unearth it, which is taboo.

The child is then washed with water. This water is thrown away as being polluted by the blood of the birth, which is taboo.

553 787 *Naming the child.* On the day of birth or on one of the following days the child receives his name (bito). There are four principal ways of choosing this.

1) Often the parents give their offspring *the name of a chief* as Musongi, Makasana, Muzila, etc. It flatters their vanity !

2) But frequently the parents like to recall a name of the old times (pfusha bito dja khale), the name of one of the ancestors, because it is a good thing to remember them. They go so far as to consult the bones. A name is proposed, and if the bones in falling do not give a favourable indication, another is tried till they feel sure that the die "has spoken" (1).

553 608 3) Or it may be that somebody asks the favour of giving his

(1) The Christian Natives like to ask their missionary to choose the name, perhaps for a similar reason.

A woman who has lost many children, three or four, is considered as being in a special position, called *bowumba*, and there are many rules to be observed in order to deal with this "state of bereavement." Should a child be born after the death of many elder brothers, he must be carried in a *ntehe* made of a sheep's skin instead of an antelope or goat skin. (See p. 46.) To carry him in an ordinary ntehe is taboo. Should it be a boy, the mother will put girl's clothing on it, and vice-versa. The mother's breast will be smeared with a special medicine, because they are "breasts of the dead (mabele ya bafi)." The child, if it lives, will be weaned as early as possible and be taken to its grandmother. Two curious rites are also practised to protect it against bad luck. The first is the *kunga* ; the second, *rangela bowumba*, seems to belong rather to the Northern clans.

The *kunga* rite which we have already met many times (see p. 124) is also performed in the case of a mother who has given birth to a new child whilst in the state of bowumba. To neglect it is a taboo. The bereaved mother keeps silent before her visitors until they have deposited their gifts at her feet and have thus "opened her mouth." Old women having no means to buy a present take a bit of grass and fix it in her hair. Then she consents to speak. She gathers all the bracelets thus obtained and puts them on the ntehe, carrying them everywhere with her.

Another rite is observed in the Northern clans. The child whose elder brothers and sisters have died is taken by the mother to the village of her own parents. There it is buried in the ash-heap up to its neck. Then somebody runs to the village, takes a handful of grains of maize and throws them on the child. Afterwards it is dug up, washed, smeared with ochre and brought home. This rite is called *rangela bowumba*, viz. to *precede* bowumba, to cut it, to treat it : the bowumba will not now come as it has been "preceded". It will be deceived, it will no longer desire the baby, as the baby has been thrown away together with all the refuse of the village on to the ash-heap. It is no longer able to eat mealies, even if it is given grains of mealies ; it is dead! Let the bowumba take no notice of it! (This description of the "rangela bowumba" was given to me by an old Thonga from Spelonken. Mankhelu, my Nkuna informant, called this rite

606 835 be banished from their thoughts. They obey that conviction when practising the avoidance rites.

The wife of the brother-in-law, the Great Mukonwana.

607 This particular respect is even more marked in the relations of a man with the wife of his wife's brother. Indeed the avoidance is pushed further than with the mother-in-law. A Native of the Ndjao tribe (which has the same customs as the Thonga tribe in this respect) described to me vividly the extraordinary marks of fear that these two persons show each other when they meet on the road. The story will be told when speaking of the Ba-Ndjao. Here are some other marks of this extraordinary respect.

607 834 The wife's brother's wife must always keep her breasts covered in the village of her husband's sister's husband. Only when she has had a child is she permitted to "open her clothing;" but then she must fix a leaf in her hair (as if to show that she does not forget the special reserve which she is bound to maintain). (Khosen region.)

607 576 827 When a man travels with his great mukonwana and they have to cross a river, they will avoid entering the same boat. It may happen to anyone to emit an unseemly sound from the rectum; but if the great mukonwana is present, she looks on this as a grave offence. A fine must be paid to her, a hoe, for instance. If the guilty man has nothing to give her, he at once breaks a twig from a tree and presents it to her as a token that the proper fine will be forthcoming in due time! He must never use words of insult in her presence, even if he addresses them to another person.

607 844 If he loses his temper before her she will go to the old people of her husband's village and tell them: "He has insulted me." On the other hand the great mukonwana is bound to go and assist the wife of this man when she gives birth to a child. At least this is the rule in the Khosa clan and also in Maputju. The two women live on very good terms with each other; they are

607 *tinhombe*. The man himself, when he visits his relatives-in-law, has the right of sleeping in the hut of the great mukonwana. We have seen that, during the first months after his marriage, he is received in the hut of his mother-in-law. Why is this? Because the oxen

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE HISTORY OF THE CHIEF.

A. BIRTH AND YOUTH.

(Information received from Tobane, and applying specially to Ronga clans).

643 824 When the principal wife of a reigning chief, she who is called "the wife of the country" (nsati wa tiko), perceives that she will in due course present her lord with an heir, she is sent away from the capital into one of the provinces, under pretext of illness. It must not be whispered abroad that she is pregnant, for, from this moment, every precaution must be taken to hide the future chief. Thus, should the event occur in the country of Mpfumo, the expectant mother might be sent into the province of Phulane.

The infant comes into the world ; should it prove to be a boy, the fact is kept a secret. Only the most renowned doctors of the country, those attached to the royal family, those who are "the strength of the land" (le' ti yimisaka tiko), are assembled to watch the birth ; they prepare, with special care, the *milombyana* (p. 48). When the queen goes out carrying her child on her back, she covers it with a piece of cloth to prevent anyone seeing whether it is a boy or a girl! She even dresses it in girl's clothing, because it is dangerous (psa henyanya), it is taboo to say in a loud voice : "This child will be a chief." Such an imprudent declaration would bring him bad luck (singita), just in the same way as would male clothing. (Mankhelu.)

643 777

The royal offspring grows, unrecognised, and is weaned in the same way as other children. The mother returns to the capital, the child remaining in the village where it was born.

nostrils and so keep it quiet during the whole operation. The milk is generally taken in a large wooden bowl. It is very seldom consumed as a liquid, but is *eaten* when thickened by coagulation. The fresh milk is poured into a calabash with an opening at the bottom closed by a cork : a certain quantity of whey has been kept in the calabash and this causes the fresh milk to curdle at once. When curdled but not yet set, it is called *shitjubi* and is eaten with spoons by men and women. But it is left to decompose : the whey *(mulaza)* soon separates from the thick part, which becomes entirely solid and is then called *ntjhwamba*. The cork at the bottom of the calabash is removed, the *mulaza* flows out freely and is drunk by the men and herd boys. The *ntjhwamba* is put into a plate and each man or woman, not having her *tihweti* (I. p. 187), approaches and takes a spoonful of it. A woman during menstruation must never drink milk, nor during her confinement or until her child has been presented to the moon (I. p. 52).

The milk of the first week after a cow has calved is taboo. It must not be mixed with other cows' milk, because the umbilical cord of the calf has not yet fallen off. It can, however, be boiled and consumed by children, as they do not count! After that milk is never boiled : not that there is any taboo to fear, but it is not customary. Natives do not give any clear reason for these milk taboos. They have no objection to selling their milk to strangers ; on the contrary, they are so eager to make money out of it that they often add water to it, and any European having had dealings with them in milk matters would have his story to tell!

Goat's milk is left for the herd boys ; men do not touch it.

II. *Other domestic animals.*

Besides oxen, the Ba-Ronga breed *goats* (mbuti, yin-tin), the care of which is relegated to the small boys (I. p. 62). Practically every one possesses one or more goats, whilst oxen are much more rarely met with.

224 of the very hard wood of the ntjenga tree, a sort of mimosa shrub,
824 and are anointed with a powder called *tjulu*. This is a deadly poison ; it is obtained from a shrub which has very pretty flowers and grows abundantly in the forests near the sea, the Strophanthus petersianus. Should an elephant fall into the game pit and succeed in escaping, it will soon die from the poisoned wound.

The marindji trap was already known to the Honwanas, three or four centuries ago, before they possessed any iron weapon. They used to kill elephants in this way and, being unable to dismember them, they made a fire all round the beast to cook it on the spot!

224 In order "to make the game forget," viz., to circumvent its
844 wariness (djibata), certain magical charms are used in connection with the trap. The fence which surrounds it is smeared over with a powder made from a human placenta. A hunter's wife carefully preserves the afterbirth of her child ; she bakes it on the evening of the day of delivery, hides it during the following day, dries it the next evening, puts it between two pieces of a broken pot, and hangs it from the roof. When the father returns from his hunting trip, he makes a powder of it, mixes it with other drugs, and uses it to smear the fence of the trap, also his arrows, or his gun. Should an antelope be wounded by a projectile covered with this drug, it is sure to fall at once! This powerful medicine is called *ndzedzena* and is deemed so important that a hunter's wife who loses the afterbirth must pay a fine of one hoe ; the hunter will try to obtain the placenta of another woman ; it is therefore not necessary that the afterbirth be that of his own wife (Viguet).

224 Game pits are not common in Thongaland ; they were still used
476 some years ago in the South of the Maputju country and in the Hlengwe territory, but I never came across any myself. At a more remote period they were employed for the most profitable collective hunting the Thongas ever attempted. All the members of the clan were summoned ; they built a strong fence as much as two kilometers in length, leaving about ten openings at equal distances ; at each of these gates was dug a game pit. In the afternoon the men assembled and prepared torches which they lighted in the evening ; and with loud shouts they chased the game